

Coffee for Freedom

UNH alums working to combat human trafficking

Wednesday, November 5, 2014

-
-
-

It's hard to fight an industry estimated to be worth \$150 billion. Especially when it exists underground. There are no headquarters to picket, no CEOs to run full-page newspaper ads against. Instead, you have to employ the water-on-the-rock philosophy: after it's been dripped on long enough, the rock will eventually break.



The Freedom Café, a by-donation coffee shop on Mill Road whose sole purpose is to fight human trafficking, wants to be that water.

Founded by UNH alumni in early 2013, the Freedom Café offers an assortment of fair trade coffees and teas. There is no set charge; people pay what they want. The first dollar earned goes toward the cost of supplies. The rest is given to groups like [Stop the Traffik](#) and [Love146](#) (named for a young girl enslaved in a brothel in Southeast Asia

who was known by a number—146—instead of her name) to help combat human trafficking around the world.

“In a way, human trafficking is a bad term,” says Michael D’Angelo ’13, one of the café’s co-founders and coordinator of its board of directors. “It’s slavery. Forced labor. Sexual exploitation. Coercion. It’s people losing their humanity; having their rights violated for money. And it’s happening every day.”

From all accounts, he’s right. Groups like the United Nations’ International Labor Organization, the World Health Organization and the U.S. State Department estimate that more than 20 million people worldwide are victims of forced labor.

It’s a 2014 report issued by the International Labor Organization titled “Profits and Poverty” that places the annual profits generated by enslavement at \$150 billion. The report’s examples of contemporary slavery include migrant workers, child soldiers, debt-bonded domestics and women and children sold into the sex trade.

“Human trafficking is the fastest growing industry in the world,” says Bryan Bessette, Freedom Café director. “We want to be a place where people engage to eradicate the problem. People can work here as abolitionists.”

Located in the basement of The Lighthouse Student Ministries building, the café is big and bright and light. The space is donated, as was the furniture. All of the baristas are volunteers. Students and faculty often stop in to eat their lunch. It’s a quiet study spot, and a growing music venue; “Perform for Freedom” open mic takes place Wednesdays from 7 to 10 p.m.



MIKE D'ANGELO

Events like the September showing of the documentary “Not My Life” that details the issue of modern-day slavery, and a recent discussion on fair trade products are held there as well.

And UNH students and faculty are getting involved. Senior Lauren Howell '15 is interning at the café for a women's studies class. Professor Tim Barretto's community leadership class, communication within communities, has been helping out with marketing, promoting the latest happenings and the upcoming Nov. 18 showing of “Girl Rising.”

“We're hoping to help promote awareness of the café, both its existence and its purpose,” Barretto says. “The work The Freedom Café is doing should be important to anyone who values justice and security for those people in the world—many of them children—who are the poorest, the most vulnerable and the most at risk of being exploited.”

Adds Howell, “Before I started here, I knew very little about the subject of human trafficking. I knew there were such things as sex tourism and wage slavery but I had no idea the extent to which they existed.”

That kind of new knowledge is what the Freedom Café is striving to spread, and has been since Sean Matthews '12 and D'Angelo founded the coffee shop.

“This space is trying to break the surface of the issue. We're trying to educate people,” says D'Angelo. “Hopefully people walk away with knowledge about human trafficking. The main thing we can do is educate. The goal is to get people to ask ‘How can I make a difference?’”

[Freedom Café on Facebook](#)

- WRITTEN BY:
[Jody Record '95](#) | Communications and Public Affairs | jody.record@unh.edu

GLOBAL REACH



University of New Hampshire

UNH Today is produced for the UNH community and for friends of UNH.

The stories are written by the staff of [UNH Communications and Public Affairs](#).

Email us: unhtoday.editor@unh.edu.

[MANAGE YOUR SUBSCRIPTION](#) [CONTACT US](#)

Like us on Facebook

Follow us on Twitter

Follow us on YouTube

Follow us on Instagram

Find us on LinkIn

UNH Today RSS feeds

UNH Today • UNH Main Directory: 603-862-1234

Copyright © 2021 • TTY Users: 7-1-1 or 800-735-2964 (Relay NH)

[USNH Privacy Policies](#) • [USNH Terms of Use](#) • [ADA Acknowledgement](#)